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# Evaluation of the role of UNDP in supporting national achievement of the Millennium Development Goals

## Executive summary

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# I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Millennium Declaration, adopted in 2000, and associated Millennium Development Goals constitute an internationally agreed set of quantifiable and time-bound goals to advance human development at the national and global levels. The Goals have shaped the UNDP programming framework to a considerable extent since 2000. Monitoring progress against their targets at national and regional levels through periodic reports has been a constant area of work over the period. In other areas of work, the extent of UNDP engagement has evolved over time. While the organization was initially focused on raising awareness and ensuring stakeholder buy-in for the Goals through a series of campaigns, after 2005 its focus moved to supporting the incorporation and mainstreaming of the Goals in national development strategies, including through estimating the cost of achieving them in specific countries, preparing macroeconomic frameworks that were consistent with the Goals or aligning poverty reduction strategies (PRSs) with them. Since 2010, UNDP has concentrated on directly supporting specific countries to close gaps in meeting particular Goals through the Millennium Development Goals Acceleration Framework (MAF).

2. At its second regular session of 2013, the Executive Board agreed that the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) would carry out a thematic evaluation of the "role of UNDP in supporting national achievement of the Millennium Development Goals". The Board noted the high strategic importance of the Goals and the potential to extract lessons learned for the post-2015 global development agenda. The evaluation was carried out within the overall provisions of the UNDP Evaluation Policy.

3. The specific objectives of the evaluation are: (a) to assess the roles played and results achieved by UNDP in support of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals; (b) to identify the factors that have affected the contribution and performance of UNDP in supporting the achievement of the Goals: strengths and weaknesses, threats and opportunities, which decisions, strategies and approaches have worked and which ones have not; and (c) based on the above, to provide strategic recommendations for fine tuning the institutional strategy of support to the post-2015 agenda.

4. The following 'roles' or aspects of UNDP work are covered by this evaluation:

(a) Millennium Development Goal 'champion' (Millennium Campaign and other advocacy and influencing efforts);

(b) Millennium Development Goal 'scorekeeper': country and regional Millennium Development Goal reports (MDGRs), the 'MDG Monitor' website and support to the MDG Gap Task Force;

(c) Technical assistance and policy support to develop and scale up Goal-based development strategies and plans at the national, subnational and sector levels, including the MAF;

(d) UNDP mechanisms to prioritize the Millennium Development Goals (trust funds, regional initiatives, implementation and monitoring and other institutional mechanisms, including the joint Republic of Korea-UNDP MDG Trust Fund);

(e) Relevant country programmes and projects in support of efforts to monitor and achieve the full set of Millennium Development Goals.

5. The evaluation looked at the support provided by UNDP to the Millennium Development Goal agenda as a whole. Therefore, activities in support of one particular Goal or sector (e.g., environment projects such as the MDG Carbon Facility) were excluded from the scope. As a result, the present evaluation may underevaluate the UNDP contribution to achievement of the Goals at the country level. Including sectoral

projects within the evaluation scope would have amounted to evaluating almost everything that UNDP does.

6. The evaluation focused on both the upstream level, attempting to measure the impact of policy advice, advocacy, awareness-raising and monitoring of progress, and on the downstream level by reviewing localization of the Goals at the subnational level. Likewise, some of the initiatives supported by the MAF and by the Republic of Korea-UNDP MDG Trust Fund focus on the upstream level, while others support subnational processes. The evaluation scope does not include the Millennium Villages as it was thought their assessment would require greater resources and time than were available. However, it occasionally drew on the findings of IEO-led assessments of development results (ADRs) on the Millennium Villages, when reviewing the overall strategic positioning of UNDP.

7. The evaluation relied on multiple data collection tools for analysis, validation and triangulation of evidence against the evaluation questions, including: semi-structured interviews with key informants; 11 country case studies for in-depth information on outcomes at the country level; a synthesis of evidence from prior ADRs and global, regional and outcome evaluations; a meta-analysis of 70 UNDP country programmes covered by a recent ADR or by one of the 11 country case studies commissioned as part of the present evaluation; a desk review of national development strategies (NDS) in 50 countries; a questionnaire survey targeted at UNDP staff and consultants; and a critical analysis of the guidance notes issued by UNDP headquarters on the Goals.

## II. Findings on specific roles and products

### Campaigning

8. Campaigning was most relevant in societies with a vibrant civil society. Through varied channels, i.e., the United Nations Millennium Campaign combined with country offices' own campaigning efforts and country MDGRs, UNDP has effectively ensured that the Goals were kept at the centre of the global, and in some cases national, development debate. However, the Millennium Campaign itself was targeted at a small number of countries. Its geographic coverage was therefore quite narrow and did not tap into the strong campaigning energy that appeared to have existed behind the Goals in Latin America. Among the Millennium Campaign's global initiatives, the Stand Up and Take Action against Poverty campaign had a large outreach to raise awareness of the Goals but lacked a clear link to policy outcomes.

### Monitoring and reporting

9. The country MDGRs, which UNDP supported in all programme countries, were relevant in most settings as reminders of governmental commitments and by providing a clear measure of progress. An estimated 450 reports were produced worldwide over the evaluated period.

10. Country MDGRs played an important role in promoting the Goals, assessing progress towards them, contributing to a national debate on development and at times highlighting a development issue that had tended previously to be ignored or not monitored. They were regularly picked up by the media, in which they tended to be viewed as 'safe' to discuss, quotable and carrying legitimacy. The reports have also been used to inform development planning.

11. The general quality of the reports has improved over time, as evidenced by the country case studies conducted for this evaluation, but many gaps remain in the data and there are significant issues in terms of the quality of the data. Initially, the reports used a scorecard format but gradually became more academic and lengthy. This tendency may

at times have gone beyond what should be required of a MDGR. Some countries have produced MDGRs almost on an annual basis, and more frequently than new relevant data was being made available through periodic surveys and censuses.

12. The UNDP contribution to Millennium Development Goal reporting at the regional and global levels was more modest than at the country level, but nevertheless was found to be appropriate and useful.

13. The broader support of UNDP for collection and analysis of data on development is relevant when it helps to fill a gap in development monitoring, and also in cases where data exist at the level of line ministries but are not well centralized by one central statistical office. UNDP support to statistical capacity and the MDGRs has led to improvements in the quality of Goal-related data and contributed to a more data-friendly environment. However, development data remain rare, scattered, costly to collect and politically sensitive. Much remains to be done, especially if the new sustainable development goal (SDG) targets are to be monitored transparently after 2015.

**Millennium Development Goal planning at national and subnational levels**

14. Support to planning and costing was most relevant in countries with a strong planning culture and apparatus. Planning at the subnational level was more relevant in middle-income countries with lagging geographical pockets and also in countries with a strong decentralization policy.

15. The evaluation estimates that over 80 per cent of UNDP programme countries have adopted a subset or the totality of the Millennium Development Goals in one or more of their development plans. The Goals have been used in national development policies and plans in different ways: as general, consensual objectives; as planned and monitored targets; or purely as a quote or reference. 'Referential use' of the Goals in plans and strategies, while initially frequent, tended to give way over time to more 'programmatic use' of the targets as planning and monitoring devices. However, not all Goals were equally likely to be included in national development strategies, with gender equality targets beyond primary education being the least used.

16. A detailed meta-analysis of 70 UNDP country programmes covered by a recent ADR or by one of the 11 country case studies commissioned as part of the present evaluation indicates that UNDP supported the integration of the Goals in national development strategies in 42 countries (60 per cent of 70 sampled programme countries), out of which the support led to some implementation at national and/or subnational levels in 22 countries (i.e., approximately half of the 42 countries in which UNDP provided support). This is lower than the target set in the relevant UNDP project document (which envisaged that "three-fourths of the support provided has been operationalized").*

17. In the same meta-analysis, UNDP was found to have supported a subnational planning process aligned to the Goals in at least 28 of 70 sampled countries, which suggests that UNDP supported such subnational planning in approximatively 40 per cent of its programme countries. However, the support led to clear follow-up and implementation of the designed subnational plans in only six (or approximately one in five) of these 28 countries.

18. Subnational plans that were aligned with the Millennium Development Goals thanks to UNDP support tended to remain unfunded in poor countries that are dependent on official development assistance (ODA) but were often well-endowed in middle-income countries that funded them out of their national budgets.

* Project document entitled 'The MDG Support Project for MDG-Based National Development Strategies, United Nations Development Programme, Bureau for Development Policy', 2006.

19. Depending on the country, reasons for non-implementation of the drafted plans appeared to include a wide variety of contextual factors such as eruption of crisis, lack of sustained political will over the long term, poor financing and relations with donors, corruption and lack of a strong planning culture. The first reason listed above, eruption of crisis, concerns half of the countries in the sample that had no or weak follow-up to their national Millennium Development Goal planning.

20. However, the non-implementation of Millennium Development Goal-based plans was compounded by factors within the control of UNDP. On a number of occasions, UNDP supported planning processes without taking into sufficient consideration the means of implementation that could realistically be made available. One case in point is the Millennium Development Goal planning exercises at the subnational level undertaken by UNDP in 2004-2006 in many countries with the help of the United Nations Volunteers programme, which were not linked to any clear funding prospect or mechanism and resulted in raising expectations that could not be met. Plans to cooperate with the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) on a more ambitious programme of support to local governments did not materialize. In the decentralized planning area, there was apparently more fruitful collaboration with the ART Global Initiative–Articulation of Territorial and Thematic Cooperation Networks for Human Development, notably in Latin America.

21. Some of the reviewed subnational initiatives may have implicitly buttressed a peace consolidation agenda by shoring up service delivery, and thus the presence of the State, in regions with a history of insurgency against the State that are now engaged in a negotiated peace process. Poor and deprived regions often coincide with instable, insecure, hard-to-reach areas, and therefore it should not come as a surprise if some support projects at the subnational level focus on areas that are to one degree or another remote, marginal or insecure.

**Millennium Development Goal Acceleration Framework**

22. The MAF, developed by UNDP during preparations to the 2010 United Nations Summit on the Millennium Development Goals (20-22 September 2010) and endorsed by the United Nations Development Group in December 2010, is potentially relevant anywhere. Using the results-based management feature of the Goals, it can help any country to identify lagging indicators and bottlenecks to achieving the Goals, and has already been used in a 'Millennium Development Goals+' context (i.e., countries where the targets were made more ambitious than the globally agreed ones). To date, 59 programme countries have initiated a MAF. However, UNDP is not the only United Nations organization to have developed such a tool. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization in particular have developed similar diagnostic tools, notably on maternal health, a lagging area in many countries. These other tools are sectoral in nature, while the comparative value of the MAF lies in its balancing of cross-sectoral and sectoral actions, focusing the fragmented efforts and resources of various actors and potentially engaging the entire United Nation country team (UNCT). In practice however, the MAF was often perceived as a UNDP-driven product and process.

23. In a few middle-income countries with a decentralized governance policy, MAFs were widely replicated with national resources. However, in low-income countries, the funding upon which the utility of the MAF is contingent was often slow to materialize. The United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) provided an effective forum to showcase the MAF process as applied in varied countries and to mobilize support from the United Nations and the World Bank to the concerned action plans.

## III. Findings by evaluation criteria

### Relevance

24. The relevance of the work of UNDP related to the Millennium Development Goals depended upon the relevance of the Goals themselves to a country's development context. The Goals call for the fulfilment of the most basic human needs. Middle-income countries that have already achieved most of the targets at the national level have tended to consider them most relevant when applied at the local level, to highlight areas of deprivation. Thus, there was initially more interest in the Goals in Africa and Asia and the Pacific than in the Arab States, Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Latin America and Caribbean regions. Competing agendas and priorities influenced relevance in certain countries, such as in small island developing states or countries experiencing crises.

25. The country level was of obvious significance in operationalizing the Millennium Development Goals. Country programmes accounted for about 80 per cent of the estimated $1.3 billion UNDP spent on initiatives under the scope of the present evaluation, to help Governments translate the Goals into pro-poor strategies, policies and programmes. UNDP country leadership proved to be a major factor affecting performance at the national level.

26. The UNDP structure of regional bureaux and country offices helped to enhance the relevance of UNDP support by adapting the organization's offer of services and products to the diverse contexts in which it works. However, at times the vigorous roll-out by UNDP of a variety of tools led to some being tried in contexts where they had limited relevance. Each tool had its own domain of relevance depending on the characteristics of each country.

### Efficiency

27. Overall, the various areas of the UNDP Millennium Development Goals programme were found to be well designed, coherent and mutually reinforcing (e.g., the MDGRs feeding into campaigning and programming). One problematic exception to this coherent offer of services concerns the various trust funds set up by UNDP to finance related activities, which were often disconnected from the mainstay of UNDP work related to the Goals. Admittedly, the more recent funds are better connected, such as the joint Republic of Korea-UNDP MDG Trust Fund. Its governance mechanism enables the funded projects to be aligned with the overall UNDP Millennium Development Goals programmes in country and globally. Some earlier funds and initiatives, including the Millennium Campaign or the Millennium Villages, were set up and operated at arm's length from the regular UNDP structure, without a clear demonstrated advantage.

28. UNDP was able to quickly push its Millennium Development Goals programmes and tools down to the country level through its country office network, but was less efficient in learning from the experiences of its country offices and national partners. There were intermittent attempts at capturing lessons, often in preparation of major global or regional conferences, but the present evaluation did not find much in terms of systematic monitoring of outputs, let alone of successes and failures at the outcome level. For instance, the website listing all MDGRs was found to be incomplete. The data from the national MDGRs was never compiled in a central database. A website created in 2007 by UNDP in partnership with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNICEF and Relief Web to be "a one-stop-shop for information on progress towards the MDGs, globally and at the country level" called the 'MDG Monitor' was never updated after the initial launch. This finding about the lack of systematic central monitoring of country-level processes echoes a recent performance audit of UNDP monitoring practices (Office of Audit and Investigations Report No. 1397, February 2015).

**Partnerships**

29. UNDP played a largely facilitative role in supporting national planning, but the determining factor was in all cases the concerned Government's pre-existing social development and anti-poverty priorities, and how well these priorities resonated with the Millennium Development Goals. Moreover, a lack of domestic and/or external funding evidently imposes limits on the extent to which national partners can implement Goal-based plans. The staff survey conducted for this evaluation confirms this diagnostic. Most respondents (85 per cent) selected high national ownership or commitment to the Goals as positively influencing the effectiveness of UNDP, followed by the availability of national resources (73 per cent).

30. In cases where domestic resources were lacking, the capacity of UNDP to reach out to donors was of critical importance. In this context, the need for the United Nations system to closely work with Bretton Woods institutions, notably the World Bank, was confirmed by the evaluation's finding at the country level and at headquarters with the CEB reviews of the MAF.

31. The UNDP relation with the specialized agencies were both strengthened and tested by the Millennium Development Goals. The Goals helped the United Nations and UNDP to recapture some of the policy space previously lost to structural adjustment and a growth-centric view of development. However, the holistic, cross-sectoral nature of the Goals imply a tension with the sectoral agendas of specialized agencies, which often considered the Goals as too simplistic. The involvement of other United Nations agencies in the preparation of country MDGRs and MAFs was useful as peer review of the MDGRs and to ensure that MAF action plans brought together stand-alone activities and benefited from sound technical inputs, although this involvement of other agencies was often found to be weaker than recommended in the relevant guideline documents.

32. Efforts to support Millennium Development Goal planning at the subnational level suffered from a weak partnership with UNCDF. The MAF filled this gap to some extent by shaping resource allocation, particularly in States with significant domestic resources, with modest UNDP technical assistance.

33. UNDP partnered well with civil society organizations (CSOs) in democratic, open societies. Not too surprisingly, the engagement with CSOs was often perfunctory in less open political contexts. Relations with the media and the private sector were found to be minimal.

**Effectiveness**

34. UNDP had a positive normative influence on development policy by helping to conceptualize the Millennium Development Goals at their onset, by mobilizing support behind them, and through its global strategy for their implementation. This established a wide consensus and a common basis on which to work. Together with the work of the World Bank, the thought leadership of UNDP and the United Nations Millennium Project helped to make the case for a significant increase in ODA in countries that can absorb it.

35. UNDP helped to align a generation of national plans and development strategies with the Millennium Development Goals, including numerous PRSs, some of which led to debt relief and/or additional funding from donors. Over and beyond PRSs, Millennium Development Goal-based national planning has been attempted in many countries but did not systematically translate into significant implementation. The evaluation identified several internal and external factors that seem to determine the utility and ultimate impact of UNDP work in this area. National ownership of the agenda, political commitment and stability are paramount. In some countries, the eruption of natural, political or economic crises rendered the Millennium Development

Goal agenda obsolete or secondary in comparison with immediate national priorities, and imposed a strong cost on achievement of the Goals and other social outcomes.

36. UNDP supported a wide range of Governments in monitoring the Goals at the national and subnational levels. As a result, even in countries where national partners did not conduct any form of Goal-based planning, work by UNDP to monitor the Goals often had a positive impact on the national capacity to collect and generate data on development outcomes.

37. The Millennium Development Goals themselves are generally seen as a success. They have improved the targeting and flow of aid and other investments, and presided over an era of increase in ODA levels. Their degree of achievement has been uneven, with persistently large inequalities between and within nations. Increased donor commitments to health and education were recorded after 2000. However, it is difficult to establish a cause-and-effect relationship since several independent initiatives in health and education have occurred before or in parallel with the Goals that have overlapping objectives. In particular, it is intrinsically difficult to distinguish the impact of the Millennium Development Goal framework from the impact of the strands of thinking that helped create the Goals in the first place (e.g., the '20/20 Initiative' that stemmed from the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, or Education For All). The Millennium Development Goals might best be viewed as reinforcing rather than driving the targeting of resources.

38. However, the Goals sometimes lent themselves to a 'drive for numbers' at the expense of quality, and to an excessive preoccupation with readily measurable outcomes at the expense of areas that are harder to measure. The Goals may have resulted in a lower quality of social services in some countries when they expanded rapidly during the period, notably in primary education. A related concern is that the particular focus of the Millennium Development Goals on certain diseases has led to the emergence of strongly-focused global funding initiatives for specific health measures and diseases (e.g., the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria), which de-emphasized systemic support to health systems and capabilities. From this point of view, the Millennium Development Goal framework may have encouraged a focus on 'quick gains' and immediate health priorities at the expense of strengthening the competence of public health institutions to tackle new, emerging health threats, such as the current Ebola crisis in West Africa.

## IV. Conclusions

39. **Conclusion 1: The basic concept of the Millennium Development Goals as well as the strategy and tools for United Nations support envisaged at the onset of the period by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, his office and the UNDP leadership have been largely validated by experience, as evidenced by the wide adoption of the Goals in national plans; the contribution of monitoring to maintaining interest; or the higher degree of collaboration observed at the global and country levels between United Nations agencies and international financial institutions.**

40. The fact that many countries, groups and individuals were keen to take part in the conversation about the post-2015 set of goals and targets that will succeed the Millennium Development Goals is a tribute to the value of the Goals themselves. There is wide agreement among development actors that there is a need for a global development agenda such as the Millennium Development Goals, and therefore that the Goals cannot be allowed to expire without being replaced by a new framework.

41. **Conclusion 2: UNDP has designed and rolled out an impressive set of diverse and complementary tools in support of Millennium Development Goal planning, monitoring and implementation. Generally speaking, the guidelines and products reviewed were of high quality and well timed. As can be expected, implementation in the field varied greatly in scope and quality.**

42. Maintaining commitment to the Millennium Development Goals agenda throughout the period proved a challenge. Within UNDP, the momentum was slow to build with the initial four to five years of the 'MDG era' essentially devoted to campaigning and research. Momentum has also slowed somewhat in the last several years with the combined effects of the preparation for post-2015 discussions and the institutional restructuring of UNDP.

43. **Conclusion 3: The successful implementation of the Millennium Development Goals required consensus and collaboration among all development actors, including among United Nations agencies. However, in its support for the Goals at country level, UNDP could have used the expertise of the specialized agencies to a greater extent. Their limited involvement emerged as a weakness in the preparation of national MDGRs, in the elaboration of the MAF and in efforts to localize the Goals.**

44. Working with others evidently takes more time, is more complex and can be more frustrating than working alone. Yet the Millennium Development Goals were conceived as a United Nations-wide project and their successful implementation requires consensus and collaboration among development stakeholders, including United Nations agencies.

45. **Conclusion 4: UNDP has often failed to translate its support into tangible development programmes and funding streams. More than half of the reviewed planning initiatives related to the Millennium Development Goals at the national or local levels remained unfunded at the time of the evaluation. Something is amiss when there is excessive attention to planning at the expense of thinking through means of implementation in a realistic manner.**

46. Planning without taking into account means of implementation is poor planning at best, and at worst amounts to tokenism. Such tokenistic Goal-related planning potentially undermined the credibility of the Millennium Development Goal agenda, and locally it raised expectations of financial assistance which UNDP was unable to fulfil.

47. UNDP depends on its partnership with Governments and donors to translate any international agenda into reality at the local level. Making this partnership work in a realistic manner was the key to success during the Millennium Development Goal era. The increased collaboration between the World Bank and the United Nations in country and at the level of the CEB augurs well for the new agenda. Partnerships with the private sector, which were weak during the Goals' era, will now be essential for success.

48. **Conclusion 5: Where and when resources were available and used judiciously, some countries' drive to implement the Millennium Development Goal agenda through ambitious policies translated into a significant expansion of social services at field level, proving that aligning national development strategies with the Goals can contribute to their achievement even in the poorest countries. These successes led to further challenges, such as a deterioration in the quality of education outcomes that was clearly linked in some countries to a rapid expansion in primary school coverage.**

49. Beyond mere access, cost and quality of service are shaping up as major issues. Historically, service outreach efforts have naturally tended to focus on the easiest communities to access, and expanding coverage therefore leads to rising marginal costs

to reach additional citizens (the 'last mile' problem). Similarly, rapid expansion of services has been associated with a deterioration in the quality of service in some countries. Educational outcomes in particular have declined in a number of countries reviewed in this evaluation as a direct result of efforts to provide universal primary education.

50. **Conclusion 6: UNDP is well positioned to approach the post-2015 era and help countries achieve the SDGs, but the emerging post-2015 agenda is significantly more comprehensive and complex than the Millennium Development Goal targets, and it will undoubtedly test the capacity of the United Nations to 'deliver as one'. Approaches similar to the MAF and national adaptation of the Goals will be increasingly required during the SDG era, in order to translate the all-encompassing SDG agenda into strong priorities at the local level.**

51. While the post-2015 agenda still needs to be negotiated, agreed to by Governments and adopted by the General Assembly, enough is currently known to draw some conclusions. The SDG agenda will be much broader in terms of what is included, which will cover the unfinished basic human needs goals of the Millennium Development Goals but also other dimensions of a broader sustainable development agenda (e.g., inequality, inclusive economic growth, urbanization, ecological sustainability), as well as the governance agenda (e.g., human rights, access to justice and rule of law, peace and conflict). This means a much longer list of goals, targets and indicators. In theory, a larger number of countries will find elements of the agenda relevant to their development needs, but to translate the lengthier SDG agenda into clear pro-poor outcomes at the country level will represent a serious challenge, requiring a quantum leap in terms of statistical capacity and costs, and thus a greater sense of focus than was called for by the Millennium Development Goals.

52. In addition, monitoring of human rights and governance is fundamentally more political and requires a greater independence from Governments than the monitoring of basic needs like access to water, health and education. As such, monitoring the SDGs will test the neutrality of the United Nations system.

53. As for UNDP, the SDGs will better anchor its work on governance and resilience in the global development agenda. UNDP will also be well placed to continue supporting national and local authorities and advance the post-2015 agenda on the basis of its experience with the Millennium Development Goals, mandate and traditional comparative advantages in terms of its field presence, trust of Governments, convening power, neutrality and coordination role. The set of tools that UNDP has supported at the country level – to monitor, report, plan, budget and programme about the Millennium Development Goals – will remain broadly relevant after 2015 when applied to the SDGs.

## V. Recommendations

54. **Recommendation 1: UNDP should organize a last round of Millennium Development Goal country reports (end-line reports) in 2016-2017 to measure progress over the entire period covered by the Goals, establish baselines for the SDG era and identify lessons learned and good practices. This will allow UNDP to establish programmes on a strong empirical basis about what forms of support worked during the 'MDG era' and what did not. UNDP should continue support to the 'unfinished Goals' even after 2015, by helping focus development efforts on the poorest countries as well as pockets of deprivation within middle- and high-income countries.**

55. The post-2015 agenda will widen the horizon, from the almost single-minded focus on poverty which was the defining characteristic of the Millennium Development Goals, to a much richer agenda that hopefully will still include the eradication of extreme poverty along with many other goals. There is a risk that the fight against poverty, whether in low- or middle-income countries, will be de-emphasized by Governments and development partners. UNDP must ensure that due attention and resources remain targeted to the poorest countries, and within a country to the poorest regions and households, even after 2015.

56. **Recommendation 2: UNDP should continue to provide Member States and organizations with guidance and thought leadership at the level of the entire SDG agenda on how to translate the post-2015 agenda at the national and subnational levels by establishing clear local priorities, while maintaining some degree of comprehensiveness and coherence with the global agenda.**

57. The present sectoral activities of UNDP in good governance, crisis and recovery, environment and poverty are well covered in the emerging post-2015 development agenda. UNDP could therefore opt to support only those specific SDGs that match its mandate and sectoral work, as specialized United Nations agencies probably will do. Over and beyond such sectoral contributions, the experience of UNDP in cross-sectoral work and its United Nations coordination mandate make a strong case for UNDP also to provide Member States and other organizations some guidance and thought leadership at the level of the entire SDG agenda, as it did for the Millennium Development Goals.

58. Given the likely long 'menu' of future SDG targets and indicators, there is a risk that some countries may pick and choose a few SDGs reflecting their core national areas of interest, and drop the rest of the agenda. While recognizing the need for local adaptation and the responsibility of developing nations to set their own development agendas, UNDP can help maintain some coherence to the SDGs as a whole by researching and raising awareness about the links between different goals. In this capacity, UNDP thought leadership work potentially will provide added value, highlighting the trade-offs that are inherent to the concept of sustainable development and proposing pragmatic ways to negotiate these trade-offs between the different goals, using a 'whole of government' approach.

59. **Recommendation 3: While the post-2015 global agenda presents new challenges, the roles UNDP played during the Millennium Development Goal era will remain useful and should be carried forward and enhanced for greater effectiveness, as follows:**

(a) **Coordination**: A greater level of coordination among United Nations agencies and a more active engagement on behalf of UNCT members will be required to effectively support the highly technical SDG agenda. At the global level, the CEB should continue to review the implementation of the approved MAF action plans, as well as that of SDG plans and progress at the country level through a 'MAF successor' that would help prioritize areas of the SDGs;

(b) **Campaigning**: A continuation of the Millennium Campaign will be necessary to promote an understanding of the SDGs worldwide, but with a better connection with UNDP regional bureaux and country offices to ensure a wider geographical coverage of the campaign. In spite of the participatory process through which the new goals were developed, the final collective global agreement will be somewhat different from what any individual country, institution or person wanted. With the core of SDGs defined, the time has come for the United Nations system to work collectively on a 're-education programme' to ensure that the new targets and indicators defined at the global level are understood in the country context. This should involve an orientation of senior UNDP leadership (resident representatives/country directors/deputy resident representatives) on what the SDGs are and what their role will be;

(c) **Scorekeeping**: UNDP should continue its coordinating role in country-level reporting and monitoring against the SDGs, and continue to invest in the quality of the data, in particular through more prolonged and in-depth technical engagement with the UNCT and the World Bank during report preparation. The SDGs will use much more comprehensive data sets, requiring a quantum leap in statistical capacity. UNDP will do well to maintain its current focus of coordinating the production of reports at the country level, drawing on its clear comparative advantage at this level, on the capacities already built and on the technical expertise of specialized agencies. It might also wish to consider a stronger role of the World Bank in the production of the SDG reports, so as to bring to bear its greater capacity to produce, manage and interpret economic data. Each SDG report should include a transparent discussion of the quality and limitations of the data;

(d) **MAF**: As a matter of urgency, a new tool for bottleneck analysis will need to be developed with broad participation from United Nations agencies and the World Bank in order to sharpen the SDG focus at the national or subnational levels. The post-2015 development agenda is meant to be universally applicable to all countries while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development. Local customization of goals and targets may therefore happen at a much broader scale than was the case for the Millennium Development Goals. A new tool will be necessary, developed and piloted as a joint United Nations effort, to make it more receptive to innovative thinking and to learn from similar tools developed by specialized agencies. Reaching a sharper focus at the country level is also the vocation of the common country assessment, which could use some MAF-inspired analysis techniques;

(e) **Policy and planning**: UNDP must train its eye on the real goal: a change in the lives of the poor. While it should continue to help align national development plans with international goals (cf. recommendation 4 below), it should also work on financing and delivery mechanisms with a view to bring lofty strategies down to earth and deliver real services to real people. UNDP will also have to rely more on its core comparative advantage in the area of sustainable human development, since even within UNDP, many policymakers think of sustainable development as environmental management. Significant work will be required for them to understand the economic, social and ecological balancing required and what this means for policy and planning;

(f) **Initiatives at the decentralized level**: SDG monitoring and planning at the subnational level will remain important, especially in the light of leaving nobody behind and addressing themes of social exclusion and inequality. UNDP and UNCDF should iron out their differences and combine their efforts in a more proactive way, recognizing that UNCDF brings its unique capacity and expertise on decentralization, while UNDP has better access to Governments and donors at the upstream policy level. A continuation of the ART-Global Initiative beyond its scheduled termination at the end of 2015 would also appear desirable, in view of the fact that UNCDF can invest only in least developed countries.

60. **Recommendation 4: UNDP support to countries and local governments in tailoring, planning, and implementing the SDGs at the national and local levels should take into systematic consideration key local factors known to influence the effectiveness of goal-based development planning, so as to focus assistance on countries and regions with good prospects for implementing their SDG-based plans and policies.**

61. The capacity of UNDP to customize and adapt its products and services to the needs of specific countries is an important strength that will need to be further enhanced to develop a context-driven SDG support programme. This evaluation has found a series of factors that have negatively affected the likelihood of countries to implement their Millennium Development Goal-aligned plans. In order to target UNDP development

planning support and resources on countries with good prospects for implementing their SDG-based plans and policies, the strategy of support to the SDGs should therefore be rooted in an initial political economy analysis that maps interest in the SDGs at the national level, and assesses the prevalence of key factors known to influence the effectiveness of goal-based development planning. Where these key contributing factors are not yet in place, UNDP should try and advocate for them as a prerequisite to any meaningful SDG-based planning.

62. **Recommendation 5: In order to support country programmes and learn from field-level experiences in SDG implementation, UNDP should establish and maintain over time a cadre of dedicated advisors at headquarters and in regional hubs, able to support the SDG work of regional bureaux and country offices over the long term, bring coherence to the overall effort and maintain some institutional memory. UNDP should document the varied approaches which will be used at the country level in a more systematic and objective way than has been the case so far. Resource mobilization and the management of trust funds also needs to be brought into a more coherent framework to support country-level activities.**

63. The Bureau for Policy and Programme Support needs to find ways to monitor consistently, systematically and over the entire SDG period: (a) its own advisory services in support of the SDGs; (b) the varied approaches used by UNDP country offices to support SDG implementation at the country level; and (c) SDG-related results across programme countries. Online forums, workshops and reviews have helped connect United Nations staff implementing the Millennium Development Goals, but information needs to be distilled further in order to learn from different countries' experiences. UNDP should explore methods to incentivize staff to document failures as much as successes, since one can only learn from a consideration of both.

64. UNDP should continue to invest resources in initiatives directly targeting communities for sustainable development and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals/SDGs, but should do so in coherence with its upstream work, for instance via greater use of seed funding that could facilitate uptake and scaling up of innovations. The practice of setting up specific projects and units at arm's length from the regular UNDP structure (e.g., the Millennium Campaign and Millennium Project) did not yield significant benefits and should be avoided as it only translates into greater disconnect between different strands of work.